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ABSTRACT

This digest, addressed to prospective teachers, consists of questions and answers that provide information on such topics as teachers' responsibilities, how to become a teacher, teacher supply and demand, salaries, and working conditions. References are included. (JD)

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SO YOU WANT TO BE A TEACHER

ERIC Digest 19

ERIC Clearinghouse on Teacher Education

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CLEARINGHOUSE ON TEACHER EDUCATION

ERIC DIGEST 19

1987

So You Want To Be A Teacher

Higher salaries, more jobs, and increased public interest in education are beginning to attract large numbers of students to a teaching career. Students also want to experience the numerous challenges and rewards involved in educating our nation's youth. An adequate background for teaching requires the ability to work with others, skills such as competency in presenting subject matter, and appropriate academic preparation, which includes a bachelor's degree. The following question-answer sequence provides prospective teachers with information on teachers' responsibilities, how to become a teacher, teacher supply and demand, salaries, and working conditions.

What do teachers do?

"Kindergarten and elementary school teachers play a vital role in the development of children" (U.S. Department of Labor 1986). These teachers introduce children to the basics of many subjects and evaluate the children's performance. Some teachers specialize in one subject, such as music, and teach that subject to several classes. Work outside the classroom includes preparing lessons, grading papers, conferences with parents, and attending faculty meetings.

Secondary school teachers assist students in moving from childhood to adulthood. They help students to learn more about subjects introduced in elementary school as well as more about themselves and the world (U.S. Department of Labor 1986). They instruct students in a specific subject, such as mathematics or chemistry, and evaluate performance. Their outside work includes preparing lessons, grading tests, and attending parent and faculty meetings.

What classes should high school students take if they want to enter college to become teachers?

Completing classes in the basic academic subjects of English, the arts, mathematics, science, social studies, and a foreign language provides a solid foundation for college (The College Board 1983). Your high school counselor can help you select the specific classes that you will need for college admission.

Do I have to go to a four-year college to become a teacher?

All states require teachers to hold a bachelor's degree, which represents the completion of a four-year college program (Burks 1986). You can begin your studies at a two-year college, however, and transfer to a four-year institution.

Do I need to take any special courses during the bachelor's degree program in order to become a teacher?

Each state has its own requirements. All states require teachers to complete a state-approved teacher education program or a certain number of credit hours in specific education and subject matter courses. In the next few years, states may require prospective teachers to complete a five- or six-year program. If these programs are instituted, it is anticipated that more subject matter and less education courses will be offered at the undergraduate level.

How do I find the colleges and universities that offer teacher education programs?

The College Board Index of Majors 1986-87 (College Entrance Examination Board 1986) and the *Chronicle Four-Year College Databook* (Chronicle Guidance Publications, Inc. 1984) are two sources. The *Databook* also provides information on choosing a school, such as size, location, costs, admission probability, and financial aid.

Where can I obtain additional financial aid information?

A general guide to obtaining financial aid is available from the ERIC Clearinghouse on Higher Education, One Dupont Circle, Suite 630, Washington, DC 20036 (telephone 202-296-2597). The college or university financial aid office is an important source. For information about federal aid programs, write to Federal Student Aid Programs, DEA-85, Pueblo, Colorado 81009. For state assistance information, contact the state scholarship agency in your state capital.

Am I admitted to a teacher education program when I am admitted to college?

Students usually are required to wait until their junior year of college to apply for admission to a teacher education program.

What is required for admission to a teacher education program during the junior year?

Most programs require personal interviews, completion of two years of courses in the arts and sciences, and a minimum grade point average. Some have test requirements.

What courses do I take during the first two years of college while I am waiting to get into a teacher education program?

Freshmen and sophomores take basic courses required for graduation, such as English and history. Often they take introductory courses in education. Two-year college students should check with their college counselors to be sure they take courses that will be accepted for graduation credit at a four-year institution.

What courses do I take after being admitted to a teacher education program?

Required courses vary widely among the states. Generally, they include: a) professional education courses, such as the history and psychology of education; b) methods of teaching; and c) student teaching in an elementary or secondary school classroom.

After I complete the teacher education program and bachelor's degree, am I eligible to receive a credential to teach?

Many states grant provisional certification and expect candidates to undertake a paid internship, working with a master teacher in a school for up to a year.

Thirty-eight states require passing scores on teaching examinations before they will grant permission to teach. The National Teachers' Examination (NTE), administered through the Educational Testing Service, is the test used most often. The NTE includes a core battery that tests communication skills, general knowledge, and professional knowledge as well as specialty area tests that measure understanding of separate subject areas such as social studies or mathematics.

Do I have to take any courses after I receive my teaching credential?

Many states require teachers to eventually obtain a master's degree, such as a Master of Education (M.Ed.), after beginning work. The M.Ed. requires at least one full year of coursework beyond the bachelor's degree with an emphasis in an area such as special or bilingual education.

Is it possible to teach with less training?

If there are not enough certified teachers available, most states will issue emergency credentials to those who want to teach but who have not met the state's minimum requirements for a regular teaching credential (Roth and Mastain 1984). Some states allow alternative teacher certification for people who have not completed college or university teacher education programs but who have an interest or experience in shortage teaching areas.

Where can I find what various states require for teaching?

The most reliable information source is the state's education department or licensing office. The addresses are listed in another good source, *Requirements for Certification*, an annual publication of The University of Chicago Press (Burks 1986).

If I meet the requirements to teach in one state, can I teach in another state?

Thirty-three states participate in an agreement that provides for graduates of approved teacher education programs in one participating state to be granted a certificate in another

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participating state.

Are there any national teaching requirements?

Nationwide teaching standards may be implemented soon. A national certification plan has been proposed by a Carnegie Commission report (1986), prepared by numerous political and educational leaders. The Holmes Group Report (1986), by several college of education deans, also supports national standards and proposes the creation of nationally standardized examinations to be required for all beginning teachers.

What is the demand for teachers?

A significant demand for additional elementary school teachers is expected until the early 1990s when a demand for more secondary school teachers will begin (Stern and Williams 1986). Currently there is a demand for more secondary school teachers in math, science, and English (Feistritzer 1985).

The demand for additional teachers will vary according to geographical location. The need for teachers is expected to be greatest in the West and Southwest. Little demand is expected in the Northeast and Midwest (Stern and Williams 1986).

Will there be enough teachers to meet the demand?

The supply of new teacher graduates is expected to decrease into the early 1990s (Stern and Williams 1986). This does not necessarily mean there will be a severe teacher shortage, however, because there may be numerous candidates for jobs in the reserve pool of teachers. This pool includes teachers employed in other fields who want to teach and former teachers who are not in the labor force.

What are the average earnings for teachers?

Teachers' salaries have increased about 25 percent in the last four years. Based on 9- and 10-month contracts, the 1985-86 national average for teacher salaries was $25,257. Elementary teachers averaged $24,762, and secondary teachers averaged $26,080 (Stern and Williams 1986). The average starting salary in 1985-86 was $16,700 (U.S. Department of Education 1987).

What working conditions do teachers have?

Most states require schools to be in session for a minimum number of days, ranging from 175 to 205. Teachers generally work on a 10-month schedule with a two-month vacation. Most states have laws that grant teachers tenure (job protection) after three years of successful teaching (U.S. Department of Labor 1986).

Elementary school teachers can expect to have about 20 students in a class and secondary school teachers about 16 students (Stern and Williams 1986). Teachers in urban schools may have larger classes with more students from varying backgrounds than rural teachers. All teachers usually stand and talk for long periods each day, which can be physically tiring (U.S. Department of Labor 1986).

Teachers often have students of widely different abilities as well as backgrounds. A growing proportion of the nation's school children come from minority groups, poor families, single-parent families, and a non-English language background (Stern and Williams 1986).

References

Many of the following references—those identified with an EJ or ED number—have been abstracted and are in the ERIC database. The journal articles should be available at most research libraries. The documents (citations with an ED number) are available on microfiche in ERIC microfiche collections at more than 700 locations. Documents also can be ordered through the ERIC Document Reproduction Service. Call (800) 227-3742 for price and other information. For a list of ERIC collections in your area or for information on submitting documents to ERIC, contact the ERIC Clearinghouse on Teacher Education, One Dupont Circle, NW, Suite 610, Washington, DC 20036, (202) 293-2450.

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